

## SUMMARY OF STEVE GUNDERSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO, THE ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TESTIMONY

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Committee on Veterans Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives

On behalf of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. We represent nearly 4 million students enrolled in our schools annually. Our schools provide the full range of higher education programs to students looking for postsecondary education with a career focus.

This nation must fulfill its higher education commitment to veterans. According to the Veterans Administration, more than 325,000 veterans and/or their families have been served by our institutions representing 28 percent of all veterans using their post 9/11-GI benefits. Although veterans make up less than 10 percent of our students, we are proud to serve those who choose our institutions. More than 1,200 of our institutions participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

In recognition of the growing numbers of military and veteran students enrolling at our institutions, APSCU adopted Five Tenets of Veteran Education that included the creation of a Blue Ribbon Taskforce for Military and Veteran Education. The Taskforce created a set of Best Practices recommendations that are attached to my testimony. The Best Practices cover the topics of (1) Consumer information, enrollment and recruitment; (2) Institutional commitment to provide military and veteran student support; (3) Promising practices for ensuring military and veteran student success through student services; and (4) Establish institutional research guidelines for tracking military and veteran student success. We are encouraging all our institutions and our colleagues at other institutions of higher education to look at these Best Practices and find opportunities to implement them where appropriate in order to best serve our military and veteran students.

A November 2010 Rand Corporation and ACE study entitled “Military Veterans’ Experiences Using the Post 9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education” reported findings which support the view that our institutions are working to support these students. The report noted that students attending our institutions had a high rate of satisfaction with the credit transfer experience, fewer challenges to accessing required courses, and higher than average satisfaction rates with academic advising.

Finally, we have included preliminary outcome data in our testimony to give the Committee a sense of how our veterans are doing after enrolling. In a survey of several member institutions, we looked at 16,500 veteran graduates and found that 75 percent earned certificates and associates degrees, while 25 percent earned bachelor’s and graduate degrees. Forty-one percent of all the veteran graduates earned credentials in healthcare fields, one of the fastest growing industries in the country. Twenty percent of veteran graduates earned credentials in skilled trade programs, such as construction, maintenance and repair, and engineering technologies. Ten percent were earned in computer and information programs like computer programming, computer graphics, computer systems networking, and information technology.

As we all strive to provide better information to all our students, we look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education to implement HR 4057 and ensure that our nation’s veterans are receiving all the information needed to make superior education decisions.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF STEVE GUNDERSON  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
THE ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
Before the  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
June 20, 2013

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee and for holding this important hearing on the Value of Education for Veterans at Public, Private and For Profit Colleges and Universities.

I am here to represent the member institutions of The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, their faculty and the millions of students who attend our institutions. Our institutions provide a full range of higher education programs to students seeking career-focused education. We provide short-term certificate and diploma programs, two- and four-year associate and baccalaureate degree programs, as well as a small number of master's and doctorate programs. We educate students for careers in over 200 occupational fields including information technology; allied health; automotive repair; business administration; commercial art; and culinary and hospitality management.

Sixty-four percent of our students are low-income. Sixty-seven percent have delayed postsecondary education making them older than the 18-22 traditional college demographic. Single parents make up 31 percent of our students and 46 percent are from a minority population. It goes without saying that our students are considered "non-traditional," but more and more they are the face of higher education in this country, so we should think of them as the new traditional. Most of our students juggle work, family and school. Most cannot attend a traditional institution of higher education because of scheduling, location or admissions criteria. Yet, these are the students who need the opportunity to pursue higher education if we are going to succeed in filling jobs that require skilled workers. Our institutions offer that opportunity and have and will continue to play a vital role in providing skills-based education.

During the recent economic downturn when states and local communities reduced education budgets, many of our colleagues at public institutions had to endure budget cuts resulting in limited access and service for students. But our institutions continued to invest in their schools to offer students industry-leading innovation while expanding capacity and meeting the evolving demands of employers. Because we are not dependent on brick-and-mortar facilities to expand access, we are able to meet the growing demand for postsecondary education through vastly expanding online technology offerings, and perhaps our most successful academic delivery – a blend of online and on-site programs.

Even while investing in education programs, our schools have been successful in reducing the cost of attendance for our students. Recently, the U.S. Department of Education released an analysis that compares the average costs at institutions between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013. Only our institutions experienced a reduction in the average costs - 2.2 percent; other sectors experienced an increase in costs, with public in-state cost increasing 6.7 percent, public out-of-state increasing 4.1 percent and private non-profit rising 3.1 percent. For two-year institutions, our schools were able to reduce costs to students by 0.2 percent, while public in-state cost increased 6.4 percent, public out-of-state increased 3.9 percent and private non-profit rose 1.8 percent. Unlike our public colleagues, we don't have differing rates of tuition for in-state versus out-of-state students.

We've expanded educational opportunities for many people, as evidenced by the increasing number of degrees our institutions have awarded. Yes, much of this is the simple result that our sector of postsecondary education is probably the newest with new campuses and new forms of academic delivery. But in an era when we expect 65 percent of all jobs and 85 percent of all new jobs to require some level of postsecondary education this growth in access is important. From 2000 to 2011, degrees awarded by our institutions have soared. Associate's degrees increased by 116,903 degrees (152.5 percent) (compared with just 52.6 percent at public and 13.7 percent at private nonprofit institutions), bachelor's degrees increased by 91,478 degrees (397 percent) (compared with just 34 percent at public and 25.5 percent at private nonprofit institutions), master's degrees increased by 66,522 degrees (572.1 percent) (compared to 37.9 percent at public and 45.1 percent at private nonprofit institutions), and doctorate degrees increased by 4,176 degrees (400.4 percent) (compared to 34.7 percent at public and 34.7 percent at private nonprofit institutions). We conferred 1.5 million degrees and 1.85 million certificates. Between 2008 and 2012, while the country was deep in recession, our institutions prepared 3.5 million adults with the education and skills essential for real jobs, real incomes and a real chance at America's middle class.

Finally, our institutions experienced a higher growth in degrees than all others between 2010/2011 and 2011/2012. Degrees conferred by our institutions increased 8.6 percent compared to 5.2 percent by public and 3.2 percent by private nonprofits. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the degrees and certificates awarded by our institutions are in some of the fastest-growing occupations nationwide. For example, in 2010/2011, we awarded 52 percent of all Dental Assistant Certificates, 50 percent of all Veterinary Technologists and Technicians Associate Degrees and 40 percent of all Diagnostic Medical Sonographers Associates Degrees. Without our students, employers in these fields would be unable to find the well-trained staff they need to deliver services to patients and customers.

We share your commitment to ensuring that every postsecondary institution provides the highest level of service to each and every student, especially active duty military, veterans and their families. We take great pride that our schools – with the support services, flexible schedules, and focused delivery of academics – are designing and delivering education in ways that meet the needs of today's military and veteran student. We strive to ensure that all students receive the education they deserve.

APSCU and our member institutions want to ensure that our students are well-prepared to enter the workforce and that every institution of higher education lives up to the high standards expected by our students. Private sector colleges and universities have a long and important relationship with our nation's military and veteran students. We celebrate who they are and what they do. Our actions, as educators of hundreds of thousands of military and veteran students, honor this partnership by providing our military and veteran students with the best possible education experience at our institutions.

According to the latest data obtained by APSCU from the Department of Defense, 762 private sector colleges and universities (PSCUs) are participating in the Tuition Assistance (TA) program and have been approved to offer courses to active duty military.

Earlier this year, when the various services announced that they would eliminate TA as a result of the Sequester, Senators Hagan and Inhofe noted in their letter to Secretary of Defense Hagel that tuition assistance is an important recruitment and retention tool that significantly contributes to our military's morale. As an all-volunteer force, during a period of prolonged conflict, effective recruitment, retention and morale initiatives are essential to attracting and retaining professional personnel. Over 60 percent of our service members stated that the increased ability to pursue higher education was an important factor in deciding to join the military. More importantly, service members have taken their ambitions and turned them into reality by taking classes and earning degrees, diplomas and certificates. These are truly extraordinary accomplishments achieved in stressful situations with time and our institutions are proud to be a part of the TA program and serve these dedicated men and women of the military.

The need for TA is confirmed in the words of Sgt. 1st Class James Wallace who is stationed at Ft. Knox Kentucky and using TA to attend Sullivan University. In a recent letter to me, Sgt. Wallace said, "I believe that the Tuition Assistance program for soldiers is a great tool to help those people serving their country prepare for the future. It doesn't matter if that person is going to make a whole 20 year career or just complete one enlistment, there is life past the military."

Sgt. Wallace went on to describe the value of TA for himself and his family saying, "Like many other soldiers I used the whole \$4,500 TA benefit every year. For the last two years, I have had to pay out of my own pocket so that I could take three classes per semester. Thanks to TA, I only have one quarter remaining before I receive my Associate's degree. My Associate's degree has helped me in applying to become a Warrant Officer. The TA program is about \$1000 short depending on the college or university that you are attending. Even though I do come up short every year, it beats having to come out-of-pocket for the whole amount. Soldiers and their families already sacrifice enough to serve their country. Anything that the government can do to help assist the quality of life for soldiers and families is greatly appreciated by them."

Another student, Staff Sgt. Thomas M. Windley wrote that he began attending ECPI University in the summer of 2004 as a veteran recently discharged from service in the U.S. Navy.

"Several months after enrolling with ECPI, I enlisted in the U.S. Army. During my attendance at ECPI, I was appointed System Administrator for my unit because of my knowledge of computer systems. I utilized my Tuition Assistance and I was able to complete my degree program and obtain an associate's degree in Network Security within 18 months. In 2007, I earned another Associate's degree in electrical engineering. It was at this point in my military career that my civilian education assisted me in being promoted over my peers. In 2010, I worked on a network installation team and within three months I earned my CompTIA A+, Network+, and Security + certifications due largely to my education, experience, and opportunity that ECPI provided me.

"In 2010, my military assignment took me overseas to Afghanistan. While deployed, I earned my Bachelor's degree in Computer Information Science with a concentration in Network Security. Earning my degree led to another promotion, which was due to the tools and benefits ECPI provided in the areas of leadership, professionalism, and core curriculum content. I have been tasked, since my promotion, with training others in my unit both below and above me in rank, to sit for certifications, thus far those I have

trained have a 100 percent pass record. I would highly recommend this program to fellow service members, I believe ECPI to have the best customer service of any online school and I have attended several. Furthermore, the curriculum is very precise and concentrated in the areas most needed to perform the job at maximum proficiency.”

Whether we are talking about Sergeant First Class James Wallace, Staff Sergeant Thomas M. Windley or an Army Major working on her Master’s degree for career advancement, these men and women know what they want and are committed to getting it. Their service coupled with their commitment to getting an education is truly extraordinary.

Educating our active duty military is as important as fulfilling our commitment to veterans. According to the Veterans Administration data, more than 325,000 veterans and their families have been served by our institutions or 28 percent of all veterans using their post 9/11-GI benefits. Although veterans make up less than 10 percent of our students, we are proud to serve those who choose our institutions. More than 1,200 of our institutions participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program and a majority of those impose no limits on the number of eligible students while providing the maximum institutional contribution.

You might ask why we serve 13 percent of all postsecondary students but 28 percent of all veterans on the Post 9/11 GI Bill? Quite simply, the answer lies in our customer service to the veterans. Returning from duty in Afghanistan or Iraq, most veterans do not want to live in a dorm and take five different three-credit courses at a time. Instead they want a focused and accelerated academic delivery that can transition them from the front lines to full-time employment as soon as possible. Because of our longer school days and year-round academic programming, our students can often complete an associate’s degree in 18 months or a bachelor’s degree in just over three years.

We understand the challenges that arise when our military men and women transition back to civilian life and enter into postsecondary education. Often, traditional institutions of higher education are not the best fit. Our military and veteran students are not the fresh-out-of-high school, first-time, full-time student living on campus and attending college thanks to the generosity of family. Our military and veteran students are like many of our new traditional students - working, with a spouse and children and paying for education with money they have saved. Service members and veterans attend our institutions because of many of the institutional qualities that are inherently ingrained into the framework of our institutions, such as geographic proximity to home or work, institutional emphasis on the adult learner, and flexible class schedules. This is why for over 65 years our schools have been providing education and training services to members of the armed services and their families.

We know that military students want career-focused education that is delivered in a flexible academic setting that best meets their unique needs. Our courses are designed to be relevant, concentrated, and suited to the personal goals of our students. This education foundation is of a particular benefit to military and veterans seeking a promotion, advance in rank or supplementing skills attained during their service. This type of purposeful, tailored education ensures that veteran and military students nimbly move from the classroom onto their next academic or professional goal. The ability to offer courses on-base, online, and on the student’s schedule is of tremendous value.

In recognition of the growing numbers of military and veteran students enrolling at our institutions, APSCU adopted Five Tenets of Veteran Education that included the creation of a Blue Ribbon Taskforce for Military and Veteran Education. The Taskforce was comprised of a broad group of individuals who share a common commitment towards the education of service members and veterans representing a

diverse range of institutions, including non-APSCU members, as well as representatives of nationally-recognized leadership organizations in the area of military and veteran postsecondary education. The Taskforce was specifically charged with identifying, collecting, and documenting practices and programs that meet the unique needs of military and veteran students, foster persistence, and enable them to meet their academic and professional goals.

I have attached a copy of the Best Practices to this testimony, so I won't discuss them in detail, but I would just highlight the four major topic areas addressed by the Taskforce. (1) Consumer information, enrollment and recruitment makes clear that information should be provided in clear and understandable language and that no student should be subjected to aggressive or misleading recruiting practices. (2) Institutional commitment to provide military and veteran student support identifies initiatives related to personnel and faculty designed to help employees understand the special needs of military and veteran students. It also identifies institutional policies aimed at assisting military and veteran students such as participating in the Yellow Ribbon program, offering a reduced military tuition rate, maximizing the use of military training credit recommended by ACE, or exceeding the standards of the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Act for deployed employees. (3) Promising practices for ensuring military and veteran student success through student services discusses the need for student centers and partnerships, such as establishing a Student Veterans of America chapter or having a military and veterans lounge where students can meet and find peer to peer support. (4) Establish institutional research guidelines for tracking military and veteran student success encourages the collection and use of data to improve programs and evaluate program effectiveness. We are encouraging all our institutions and our colleagues at other institutions of higher education to look at these Best Practices and find opportunities to implement them where appropriate in order to best serve our military and veteran students.

A 2010 study by the Rand Corporation and ACE entitled "Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post 9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education reported findings which support the view that our institutions are working to support these students. The report noted the following:

- Rate of satisfaction with the credit transfer experience was 60 percent among survey respondents who had attempted to transfer military credits to our institutions, versus only 27 percent among those from community colleges and 40 percent among respondents from public four-year colleges. Only participants from private nonprofit colleges reported higher credit transfer satisfaction rates, at 82 percent;
- Respondents from our institutions reported fewer challenges to accessing required courses than all other institutions except for four-year public institutions (33percent of respondents at public two-year colleges, 26 percent at private nonprofits, 22 percent at our institutions and 18 percent at public colleges).
- Survey respondents in private sector colleges and universities reported higher than average satisfaction rates with academic advising, at 67 percent, versus about 50 percent satisfaction among respondents at other institution types.
- Reasons for choosing our institutions included: career oriented programs with flexible schedules, like-minded adult students, flexible credit transfer rules and same institution in multiple locations.

Many PSCUs offer a reduced military tuition rate for active duty, National Guard, and reserve service members and their spouses to minimize out-of-pocket student expenses and offer scholarships to wounded

service members and their spouses as they recover from their injuries and prepare for new career opportunities. Some also maintain a military-friendly deployment policy, which allows military students to withdraw and return to school at any time if they are deployed and provide specialized military student advisors to evaluate past military training and experience and assess eligible academic transfer of credit based on American Council of Education (ACE) recommendations. The generous awarding of credit for military skills and experience and fair transfer of credit policies exemplify how PSCUs strive to be responsible stewards of this educational benefit, as exiting service members are not forced to take duplicative or extraneous classes.

Recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data suggest that the unemployment situation of our nation's veterans is improving, this population, particularly in the age 18-24 category, has historically experienced higher unemployment than civilians. The Administration, veteran advocates, and veteran service organizations (VSOs) have responded by developing and implementing initiatives to put veterans in jobs.

The American Legion has partnered with DoD to educate state legislators and governors on the actual value of military skills and experience and how they translate into a civilian employment environment. Additionally, the American Legion is serving as an advocate for changing current state laws to enable credentialing and/or licensing boards to consider military skills and experience when evaluating a candidate for a license or certification. The American Legion has also partnered with the Administration and the Departments of Defense, Energy, Labor, and Veterans Affairs to evaluate the current job-task analysis (JTA), identify any gaps in the JTA, and work with the private sector and postsecondary education to the best address how to fill the gaps through higher education, on-the-job-training, or apprenticeships. This initiative relies on the symbiotic relationship between credentialing, higher education, public and private entities to proactively work together to reduce veteran unemployment.

When members of the armed forces leave, they enter a pivotal transition period that is often wrought with challenges, and as a result, the potential for failure is high. As we have discussed, our institutions are fully committed to helping veterans achieve success in higher education. This commitment and focus on educating members of the military, as well as veterans and their families is critical because according to the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) over 80 percent of members only have a high school diploma.

Our nation currently faces twin crises - stubbornly high unemployment and a skills gap where employers all across the country cannot find trained and job-ready workers. The key to narrowing the skills gap and reducing civilian and veteran unemployment is an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to postsecondary education. All sectors of higher education must be part of the solution and accountable for the educational experience and outcomes of all students, especially military and veteran-students.

In a survey of a several member institutions, we looked at 16,500 veteran graduates and found that 75 percent earned certificates and associates degrees, while 25 percent earned bachelor's and graduate degrees. Forty-one percent of all the veteran graduates earned credentials in healthcare fields, one of the fastest growing industries in the country. The occupations range from medical, dental and veterinary assistants to nurses and technologists of various types with weighted average annual salaries of \$33,226 for certificate and associate degree holders to \$56,335 for bachelor and graduate degree holders. Another 20 percent of veteran graduates earned credentials in skilled trade programs, such as construction, maintenance and repair, and engineering technologies. According to BLS, the United States will need more than 1 million additional workers to fill these jobs by 2020. The weighted average annual salary for our veteran graduates earning their certificates and associate degrees in these fields was \$44,500. Ten

percent were earned in computer and information programs like computer programming, computer graphics, computer systems networking, and information technology. The weighted average annual salary is \$57,574 for certificate and associate degree holders and \$89,064 for bachelor and graduate degree holders. The US will need nearly three million additional computer and IT workers by 2020.

We want to work with you to provide our service members and veterans, particularly young combat veterans, with the tools and resources to make an informed, thoughtful decision about which educational opportunity will best prepare them for the workforce.

The facts are simple: Career-oriented schools are educating America's next generation and helping secure our nation's economic vitality. We all agree that a higher education degree greatly improves employment opportunities and income. At a time of extended, high unemployment and economic hardship, we should be supporting anyone seeking access to skills and training that will allow them to better their own future.

President Obama has challenged all Americans to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training, under the belief that if we are to succeed economically as a nation, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. To meet President Obama's challenge we will have to ensure that people who historically have not pursued higher education or succeeded in completing their postsecondary education must attend and complete their education. From both a jobs and a global competitiveness standpoint, our institutions can help fill the existing education and skills gap and meet capacity demands that cannot be satisfied by public and private non-profit colleges alone. Increasing the number of educated people is essential. Research shows that raising the college graduate rate just a single point will unleash \$124 billion per year in economic impact on the 51 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S.

Private sector colleges and universities have demonstrated a unique capability to confront the challenges of educating America's middle class. We have been at the forefront of the effort to close the skills gap by offering career-focused training aiding business owners seeking workers with specific training and expertise. We have made it our mission to close this gap and are working every day to achieve that end.

Private sector colleges and universities are able to accommodate the needs of non-traditional students in ways that traditional four-year universities cannot. Whether its veterans transitioning from war zones to the workplace or single parents with family responsibilities seeking a way to earn more for the future, career-oriented schools understand the rigorous demands that these individuals face and tailor course schedules, offer focused curriculum and provide academic delivery mechanisms that fit their needs. We are also investing in our students and expanding facilities to meet the growing demand for higher education, which includes returning veterans, their spouses and families.

We share President Obama's commitment and passion for education, and look forward to working with him and the Congress to ensure that all Americans can attain the skills they need to access meaningful opportunities.

We take seriously the charge to work with veteran and military student populations and prepare America's students to succeed in the workforce. As we all strive to provide better information to all our students, we look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education to implement HR 4057 and ensure that our nation's veterans are receiving all the information needed to make superior education decisions. Private sector colleges and universities look forward to

helping these students achieve their dreams, maintain military readiness and prepare them for life after the military.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions and discussing these important issues with you today.



## STEVE GUNDERSON BIO

Steve Gunderson was named President and CEO of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) in January, 2012. His appointment continues an entire career of leadership and engagement the education and workforce investment challenges facing America's citizens.

This commitment began at the age of 23, when he was first elected to the Wisconsin State Legislature. After three terms in Madison, Gunderson served 16 years in the U.S. Congress and was a recognized leader on agriculture, education, employment policy, health care and human rights issues. Following his career in public service, he was named the senior consultant and managing director of the Washington office of The Greystone Group, a strategic management and communications consulting firm. His portfolio centered around research, writing, speaking and consulting on the jobs revolution in America. He was the lead author of a book on this subject, [The Jobs Revolution: Changing How America Works](#).

Gunderson spent the last six years as President and CEO of the Council on Foundations. One of his many priorities at the Council was education and workforce investment. Under his leadership the Council has created a division for Public-Private Partnerships where the National Fund for Workforce Solutions operates under the leadership of Stephanie Powers. A researcher and a writer, Steve has recently published his latest book *The New Middle Class: Creating Wages, Wealth and Opportunity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

He is recognized for his insight and analysis on the national political issues of the day, and has lectured widely from Harvard University to The Brookings Institution.

Steve graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison with a degree in Political Science. He then completed studies at Brown School of Broadcasting in Minneapolis. Today, he lives in Alexandria, Virginia, with his partner Jonathan Stevens. He serves on various nonprofit boards including Lutheran World Relief; The Gettysburg Theological Seminary; and The White House Fellows Selection Commission.



June 16, 2013

TO: Committee on Veterans' Affairs

I am Steve Gunderson, President and CEO of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU). I have not and APSCU has not received any Federal grants or contracts during this fiscal year or the previous two fiscal years relevant to the subject matter of my testimony.

Steve Gunderson  
President and CEO



APSCU®

ASSOCIATION OF  
PRIVATE SECTOR COLLEGES  
AND UNIVERSITIES

BEST PRACTICES FOR  
***MILITARY AND  
VETERAN STUDENTS***

FEBRUARY 2013



## MISSION STATEMENT

*The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) has established this “Blue Ribbon” Taskforce to ensure that every service member, veteran, and family member utilizing their earned, postsecondary education benefits are provided with the quality education to which they are entitled at every institution of higher education. The Taskforce is comprised of a broad group of individuals who share a common commitment towards the education of service members and veterans representing a diverse range of institutions, including non-APSCU members, as well as representatives of nationally-recognized leadership organizations in the area of military and veteran postsecondary education. The Taskforce has been specifically charged with identifying, discussing, and documenting the very best postsecondary education practices and support services that meet the specific needs of military and veteran students. The primary objective of the Taskforce is to publish a set of recommended institutional standards and associated operational practices that foster persistence, program completion, and other factors that will enable the military and veteran student population to achieve its academic and professional goals. The final product will represent a condensed, practical set of suggested actions and policies for all institutions of higher education.*



To view a full copy of the report of the APSCU Blue Ribbon Taskforce for Military and Veteran Education visit **[www.apscu.org/blueribbon](http://www.apscu.org/blueribbon)**.

# MEMBERS OF THE APSCU BLUE RIBBON TASKFORCE FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN EDUCATION

The Taskforce has been led by **Jeff Cropsey**, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at Grantham University and Chair, Public Affairs, Council of College and Military Educators and **James Hendrickson**, Vice President of Military Relations at Colorado Technical University and Executive Director of the CTU Wounded Warrior and Spouse Scholarship Program.

## Other Members of the Taskforce include:

- **Jeff Arthur** - CIO and Vice President of Financial Assistance, ECPI University
- **Mike Betz** - General Manager, Military Student Initiatives, Education Corporation of America
- **Scott A. Kilgore** - Senior Vice President of Military of Affairs, Kaplan University
- **Russell Kitchner, Ph.D.** - Vice President for Regulatory and Governmental Relations, American Public University System
- **Scott D. Palumbo, LCDR. USNR** - formerly National Director of Military Affairs, DeVry University
- **James Shane, Jr., BG. USA (Ret.)** - Director of Military and Veterans Affairs, Sullivan University
- **Kathy Snoad** - Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium President and Vice President for Military and Veteran Partnerships, American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- **Dennis Trinkle, Ph.D.** - Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Harrison College
- **Joseph W. Wescott, Ph.D.** - Executive Director, Veterans and Military Education Programs, North Carolina State Approving Agency and Vice President, National Association of State Approving Agencies
- **Garland H. Williams, Ph.D., Col. USA (Ret.)** - Associate Regional Vice President, Military Division, University of Phoenix

## Special Advisors:

- **Michael Dakduk** - Executive Director, Student Veterans of America
- **Ryan M. Gallucci** - Deputy Director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.
- **Steve Gonzalez** - Assistant Director, National Economic Division, American Legion

# BEST PRACTICES FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENTS

## PREAMBLE

These Best Practices represent the collective efforts of the work of the Blue Ribbon Taskforce. The institutions represented on the Taskforce are incredibly diverse in size, ownership structures and academic programming and provide career-centered education ranging from skilled trades to post graduate degrees. However diverse, these Best Practices were created to encourage all institutions of higher education to aspire to high levels of service for this special group of students.

The Best Practices are organized under four subject areas:

- Full transparency and accuracy of information in the recruitment and enrollment process.
- Institutional commitment supporting the military and veteran students' academic needs.
- Appropriate student services reflecting the numbers and needs of their military and veteran student population.
- Pursuit of outcomes data related to retention, degree completion and other metrics for an institution's military and veteran students, enabling us to learn and improve our services in the future.

The Taskforce is mindful that the diversity of institutions – in size, number of veterans and/or military students, types of academic programming, and other factors – will result in implementation of many, but not necessarily all the Best Practices, in ways appropriate to the needs of each institution and its military and veteran students. We recognize and celebrate this diversity of service while being unified in our commitment to excellence in military and veteran education.



## BEST PRACTICES FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENTS

- I. Consumer Information, Enrollment and Recruitment...page 4
- II. Institutional Commitment to Provide Military and Veteran Student Support...page 7
- III. Promising Practices for Ensuring Military and Veteran Student Success Through Student Services...page 9
- IV. Establish Institutional Research Guidelines for Tracking Military and Veteran Student Success...page 11

## CONSUMER INFORMATION, ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT:

Prospective military and veteran students should receive appropriate, relevant information in order to make a sound, informed decision about their postsecondary education. Information should be provided in clear and understandable language. Prospective students looking to utilize their U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) or U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits should not be the subject of aggressive or misleading recruiting practices. Institutions should follow all federal and state laws and regulations to ensure that the recruitment of military and veteran students is appropriate.

### *A. Consumer Information*

- i. Provide accurate and complete information to prospective students on:
  - Institutional and programmatic accreditation status for each offered program;
  - Whether program meets minimum requirements to qualify student for state licensure in relevant occupation(s);
  - Potential earnings and employment pathways of program completers;
  - Financial obligations and cost of educational program;
  - Institution participation in various military and veteran programs and partnerships; and
  - Institution transfer of credit policies.
- ii. Require prospective students to affirm receipt and understanding of the required disclosures.

- iii. In an effort to achieve complete transparency, include information in catalogs, websites, and other media outlets that adheres to the following minimums:
  - Clearly articulated and defined mission statement;
  - Clearly defined academic and financial information about program requirements; and
  - Total cost of admission, tuition, instructional materials, and all mandatory fees.
- iv. Provide in-depth financial counseling, so that prospective students fully understand their financial obligations upon enrolling in an educational program.
  - Explain the extent to which DoD Tuition Assistance and VA education benefits will pay for the cost of the education;
  - Explain the ramifications of student loan debt, in terms of monthly repayment obligations when feasible;
  - Explain long term financial obligations related to use of educational benefits as compared to borrowing under federal or private loan programs; and
  - Always encourage responsible borrowing if a student needs or chooses to borrow to pay for education costs or other personal expenses which may be covered by federal loan funds.

#### *B. Recruitment*

- i. Develop and/or maintain enrollment and recruitment policies appropriate to higher education institutions and compliant with federal and accrediting agency regulations.
- ii. Use only promotional and recruitment materials and practices that do not have the capacity to mislead or coerce students into enrolling and are consistent with policies of the VA, Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Department of Education (ED), and all applicable federal and state regulations.
- iii. Create reasonable internal policies for contacting potential students that do not exert high pressure to enroll through unsolicited follow-up calls or other forms of personal contact.

For example:

- Marketing and outreach systems, including third-party vendors, must have an opt-out feature for individuals who do not wish continued recruiting contact; and
  - Establish and enforce internal call limits on unsolicited recruiting calls, such as a “Three Calls then Stop” policy.
- iv. Employ appropriate sanctions, including termination of employment, on recruiters and managers found to have engaged in predatory recruitment practices.

### *C. Enrollment*

- i. Ensure students are appropriately placed and prepared for the programs in which they enroll. Consider employing any of the following practices: (a) assess academic readiness prior to enrollment; (b) offer appropriate remediation if necessary; (c) offer limited course loads; (d) offer a reasonable “Trial Period” for enrollment; (e) offer penalty-free drop/add periods upon enrollment.
- ii. Offer military and veteran students a tailored orientation program, which would provide an overview of specific information regarding VA certification requirements, satisfactory academic progress, and additional tutorial assistance, as appropriate.



## INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUPPORT

Institutions should actively support and promote programs and services for military and veteran students. Institutions should employ an engaged faculty that understands the needs of military and veteran students and provides mentoring and advising to ensure the success of these students. Institutions should consider instituting the following, as applicable:

### *A. Personnel/Faculty*

- i. Appoint a senior-level administrator to lead the institution's military and veteran support programs (or Office of Military and Veteran Affairs).
- ii. Designate an employee, or team of employees (as student enrollment numbers dictate), to provide support/services tailored to the needs of the military and veteran students.
- iii. Appoint a Military and/or Veteran Student Ombudsman to escalate and resolve issues related, but not limited, to DoD or VA educational benefits, academic enrollment issues, and institutional policies and procedures.
- iv. Conduct regular roundtable discussions, focus groups, and/or interviews with service-member military and student veteran organizations, either on-campus or virtually, to establish a continual understanding about the needs of the military and veteran student population enrolled at the institution and how to meet those needs.
- v. Appoint an interdepartmental military and veteran education taskforce to evaluate the institution's policies, practices and procedures relating to the military and veteran students.
- vi. Institute faculty development training to ensure that faculty members:
  - Receive the necessary tools and information regarding the unique qualities of the military and veteran learner;
  - Learn effective classroom instructional practices to better meet the needs of this non-traditional student population; and
  - Understand the various support services available to military and veteran students and the associated referral processes for accessing those services.
- vii. Institute campus wide training on the specific needs and resources available for military and veteran students and their families.

## *B. Administrative Policies and Practices*

- i. If applicable, become a Yellow Ribbon Program participating institution, offsetting the unmet cost of an education for eligible VA education beneficiaries and consider the following:
  - Allow “all” or an unlimited number of eligible veteran students to enroll; and
  - Offer the maximum institution contribution allowed under the program.
- ii. Offer alternative grants to veterans and their spouses who may not be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to cover any funding gaps not covered by other financial aid benefits, such as the Montgomery GI Bill.
- iii. Offer a reduced military tuition rate for active duty, National Guard, and reserve service members and their spouses to minimize out-of-pocket student expenses beyond what DoD Tuition Assistance (TA) benefits cover.
- iv. Adopt a policy for evaluating and awarding credit for military training and experiences, maximizing the use of military training credit recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE).
- v. Comply with existing federal requirements related to the postsecondary education of military or veteran students, including:
  - Enter into the DoD Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for participation in TA; and
  - Formally agree to accept the Principles of Excellence outlined in Executive Order 13607 – Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.
- vi. Become a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium.
- vii. Establish Human Resources policies that exceed the standards set by the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA). Institutions of higher education with employees currently serving in the military should exceed USERRA guidelines for employees during military training activities and deployment status.
- viii. Offer multiple learning formats for military and veteran students to access and interact with program curriculum and course materials, which allow students the freedom to pick the format that best suits their learning style. These formats may include videos, text, a library of archived audio content of classroom instruction, problem-solving activities, and practice tests.

## PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENSURING MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH STUDENT SERVICES

Recent studies and anecdotal information related to military and veteran student success reveal a growing trend toward centralized student services at institutions with significant populations of military and veteran students. Building on the success of existing programs, institutions of higher education should strive to provide the following services and programs tailored to the specific needs of their military and veteran students:

### *A. Centers*

- i. When the number of students necessitates its creation, institutions should establish an Office of Military and Veterans Affairs with clearly articulated goals and expectations, which complement the mission of the institution, accompanied by the full support and resources from the institution's leadership. The Office of Military and Veterans Affairs would typically administer and manage the following:
  - Military and veteran-specific Student Advisors in the areas of admissions, academics, and benefits;
  - Specific academic counselors for the military and veteran student population trained to address transfer credit and awards for prior academic or military credit (College Level Examination Program (CLEP), portfolio, military training);
  - Trained VA certification specialists to assist with the timely processing of educational benefits documentation to avoid benefit funding delays; and
  - A tailored orientation program for military and veteran students, developed to enable active-duty, Guard, or Reservist students or transitioning veterans to optimize the available institution resources and support programs.
- ii. Another approach is to establish a Military Student Center (MSC), which acts as a hub to guide military and veteran students throughout their postsecondary experience, beginning with recruitment and ending with job placement. The MSC functions as a clearinghouse of information for all military and veteran benefit programs and assists potential and current students with navigating the intricacies of the federal programs for which they may be eligible. More specifically, the MSC may function as follows:
  - Counsel prospective students who self-identify themselves as military- or veteran-affiliated on the best way to access and maximize the benefits for which they are eligible;
  - Staff the MSC with specialists who are either a military veteran or spouse who received specific training in DoD and VA benefits eligibility and processes; and

- Provide transfer of credit assistance, help with military and prior-college transcript requests upon application and acceptance to a program of study, training to Program Directors and Deans regarding ACE guidelines for the award of military credit, and recommendations for credit acceptance based on review of military transcripts and Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).

## *B. Partnerships*

- i. Support student veterans interested in organizing a campus-based, or online, student organization with necessary resources and use the Student Veterans of America (SVA) as a resource and guide. Institutional support for student veterans to create a student veteran organization or club is critical to fostering successful veteran student transition, peer support, and camaraderie, and providing needed opportunities for student veterans to network and make social connections with other student veterans who possess similar interests or experiences.
- ii. Establish a Campus Military and Veterans Lounge or Virtual Student Gathering Place, which allow military and veteran students to interact, access program-related resources and services, and provide peer-to-peer support.
- iii. Establish and maintain student chapters of professional organizations and academic honor societies to expose students to potential professional networks. Encourage student membership and participation in relevant local, regional or national professional societies while completing coursework.
- iv. Introduce and partner with established veteran service organizations, such as the American Legion or Veterans for Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), within the geographical area of the campus to further connect veteran students to community resources and peers.
- v. Institutions with a sufficiently large military and veteran population should develop a specific career services strategy, including:
  - Establishing partnerships with employers who will work with students while enrolled and offer quality job opportunities upon graduation;
  - Establishing formal alumni networks for military and veteran graduates, allowing students who have completed programs of study to interact with one another, building geographically based or industry-based professional networks; and
  - Engaging with local Employer Support for Guard and Reserves (ESGR), professional associations such as Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

## ESTABLISH INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH GUIDELINES FOR TRACKING MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUCCESS

Tracking data related to credit completion, degree completion, and student satisfaction is vital to understanding successful student outcomes. Accurate data collection is essential to understanding and addressing the needs of military and veteran students and their families. To the extent practicable, institutions should:

### *A. Collect/Use Data*

- i. Identify and track military and veteran student populations with regard to retention, degree completion, persistence, and other valuable metrics.
- ii. Analyze and use data to identify areas in need of improvement and ways to better serve military and veteran students.
- iii. Use data to develop measures to evaluate program effectiveness.

### *B. National Student Clearinghouse*

- i. Participate in the National Student Clearinghouse to help to provide meaningful data for military and veteran students across higher education (transfer, degree completion, and persistence).
- ii. Provide meaningful data to the VA and DoD for use in developing programs to better serve military and veteran students.



# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX I: INSTITUTION RESOURCES

- i. Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV)
- ii. Veteran-Civilian Dialogue
- iii. Veterans in Transition Course
- iv. Military to Civilian Transition Manual
- v. Mobile National Test Center (NTC) for CLEP and DSST exams
- vi. Transfer credit evaluation at no cost – awards transfer credit for ACE approved military training
- vii. Webinar series for veterans and employers of veterans
- viii. Institution Skills Translator
- ix. ACE Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions, March 2012

## APPENDIX II: COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

- i. Veteran Stand Down (KCMO) – volunteer annually
- ii. Toys for Tots – collect toys annually
- iii. Partners with Veterans Today Network to hire veteran employees
- iv. Teamed up with CCME Cares to send care packages to deployed troops over Valentine's Day
- v. Fundraising for Wounded Warrior Project over Veterans Day
- vi. Annual sponsor of KC Association of the United States Army's Army Birthday Ball

## APPENDIX III: MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

- i. SOC
- ii. CCME
- iii. Yellow Ribbon Program
- iv. DoD MOU
- v. Principles of Excellence

## APPENDIX IV: PUBLICATIONS

- i. From Boots to Books: Applying Scholssberg's Transition Model to the Transition of Today's American Veterans to Higher Education
- ii. From Combat to Campus: Voices of Student-Veterans
- iii. A New Generation of Student Veterans: A Pilot Study
- iv. The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life
- v. Veterans' Post-Secondary Education: Keeping the Promise to Those Who Serve
- vi. Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium Publications/Forms/Resources (Principles and Criteria, Standards of Good Practice for Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, Pocket Guide for College Outreach to Military Students, Veteran and Military Family Programs and Services, and Military Student Bill of Rights)
- vii. Educational Attainment: Tracking the Academic Success of Servicemembers and Veterans, July 2012, Education Working Group convened by SOC

- viii. From Soldier to Student II Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members, July 2012, prepared by American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators (NAPVA)
- ix. Time is the enemy, September 2011, Complete College America
- x. Service Members in School: Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education, November 2010, prepared by the RAND Corporation, with support from Lumina Foundation for Education for the American Council on Education (ACE)
- xi. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Major Differences: Examining Student Engagement by Field of Study, Annual Results 2010, sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- xii. Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education: What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions, July 2009, prepared by Alexandria Walton Radford, MPR Associates, Inc. with support from the ACE Center for Policy Analysis Center for Lifelong Learning and the Lumina Foundation for Education
- xiii. From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus, July 2009, prepared by ACE, SOC, AASCU, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and NAPVA with support from the Lumina Foundation for Education



## SPECIAL ADVISORS

### **American Legion**

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veteran's organization. Focusing on service to veterans, service members and communities, the Legion evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States. Today, membership stands at over 2.4 million in 14,000 posts worldwide. The posts are organized into 55 departments: one each for the 50 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico and the Philippines. The birth of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known informally as the GI Bill of Rights, was a law that included several key parts: educational opportunity; on-the-job training; unemployment benefits; home, farm and business loans; review of discharges; health care; disability claims and veteran employment services. Today, the American Legion continues to work with all stakeholders in protecting and creating meaningful veterans education benefits that truly meet the needs of our 21st century veterans.

### **Student Veterans of America (SVA)**

The mission of SVA is to provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and following graduation. Today's veterans face numerous obstacles in their path to attaining a college degree. These challenges range from a missing sense of camaraderie to feeling like an outsider amongst 18 year old traditional students to a lack of understanding by university faculty. When coupled with the visible and invisible wounds of war, a college degree can be an elusive goal for men and women returning from military service. SVA makes that goal a reality. SVA is a coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses around the globe. These member chapters are the "boots on the ground" that help veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. Each chapter must be an officially recognized student group by their university or college and provide a peer-to-peer network for veterans who are attending the school. Additionally, chapters often coordinate campus activities, provide pre-professional networking, and generally provide a touchstone for student veterans in higher education.

### **Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW)**

Since 1899, the VFW has continued to be a leading voice in veterans' advocacy, helping to enact nearly every major Quality of Life initiative for the benefit of every generation of veteran, military service member and their families. Composed of 2 million VFW and Auxiliary members in 7,200 VFW Posts across the country and around the world, the VFW creates, protects and enhances these benefits and programs by actively engaging with Congress and the White House. From the passage of the original World War II GI Bill of Rights in 1944 to the Montgomery GI Bill and now Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VFW will continue to advocate for student-veterans to improve their earned educational benefits and the consumer product information they deserve to receive.



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